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A FELDSTEIN TRAVEL FIELD GUIDE

The Hotel Loyalist's Guide to Explora Journeys

For travelers used to Aman, Four Seasons, and Rosewood.

If you choose a suite by what sounds good rather than square footage and deck position, you'll overpay by 20–40%. This guide fixes that.

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Who This Is For (and Who It Isn't)

For you if:

- Your hotel standard is Aman, Four Seasons, or Rosewood. You notice thread count.
- You've looked at Silversea, Regent, or Seabourn and wondered whether any actually deliver the hotel-quality promise, or just use the right words.
- You want real time in ports, not a herded bus tour, and you don't want a ship that feels like a convention center on water.

Not for you if:

- You measure value by activities and nightlife. Explora's evening entertainment is thin.
- Your budget for a week for two is under $7,000 all-in. The entry Ocean Terrace Suite starts around $800 per night double, before air.
- You need structured programming for kids. This is primarily an adult product.

The sweet spot: hotel-oriented couples in their 40s to 60s who want a property that happens to move between interesting cities.

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What Explora Actually Is

Explora Journeys is a luxury ocean brand launched by MSC Group in 2023. Explora I entered service that year, Explora II in 2024, Explora III in summer 2026. The MSC parentage cuts both ways: the financial backing to build six ships and the port relationships to dock where others can't, but not an independent boutique operation. Both reactions are fair.

What Explora is building, deliberately, is a hotel-first product afloat. The floor plans read like Four Seasons room specs: 377 sq ft at entry, heated bathroom floors, walk-in wardrobes, terraces with real dining tables and daybeds rather than a deck chair. The host-to-guest ratio is 1.25:1. There are 461 suites on a ship built for fewer than 1,000 guests.

The all-inclusive package covers what you'd actually spend money on: every restaurant except Anthology (a $165 per person tasting menu), all alcohol including champagne and premium spirits, Wi-Fi, gratuities, and port shuttles. The only meaningful extras are Anthology, shore excursions, and spa treatments beyond the thermal area.

It is not a traditional cruise. No waterfall atrium, no casino as the focal point, no formal night, dress code resort casual. The nine dining venues feel like an independent restaurant row. On suite

quality, food, and space per guest, it is the closest thing afloat to an Aman or Four Seasons that moves. It is not there on every dimension yet, and the honest gaps are on a later page.

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The Suite Categories: What Explora Won't Put in a Clear Table

Explora has 14 sub-categories across 4 tiers, shown on the site in separate marketing pages. Here is the version that helps you pick.

Tier 1: Ocean Suites (the entry tier)

SUB-CATEGORY	SQ FT	DECK	FROM (DOUBLE)	BEST FOR
Ocean Terrace Suite	377 sq ft	varies	entry	Solo travelers, couples who spend time ashore
Ocean Grand Terrace Suite	420 sq ft	Decks 6–7	slight premium	Anyone who wants 43 more sq ft of terrace

The real difference is the terrace: about 11 sq m on the Grand, decks 6 and 7 mid-ship and stable. If you're between the two, the Grand Terrace is the better use of the premium. On square footage the entry tier wins for the price: Silversea's entry Vista on Silver Nova is 323 sq ft, Regent's Concierge on Seven Seas Explorer is 307. What you give up: dining reservations open at 75 days (vs 90 for Penthouses), and no included pressing or laundry.

> **Value pick:** Ocean Grand Terrace on Explora I or II for a 7 to 10 night Mediterranean Journey.
> **Oversold:** the standard Ocean Terrace at the top of its band. When it's within 15% of the Penthouse entry, step up.

Tier 2: Ocean Penthouses (the step-up tier)

SUB-CATEGORY	SQ FT	KEY ADD	BEST FOR
Penthouse	463–517 sq ft	Indoor dining area for 4, full terrace	Couples who want to eat in-suite
Deluxe Penthouse	463–657 sq ft	Larger, more flexible layout	Wide range; verify sq ft for the ship
Premier Penthouse	517–571 sq ft	Entrance hall, more separation	A defined arrival space
Grand Penthouse	646–743 sq ft	Residential zones, double sofa bed	Families of 3, or couples wanting real living space
Grand Penthouse with Whirlpool	646–743 sq ft	Private terrace whirlpool	Explora V and VI only

The tier gets you dining reservations at 90 days (vs 75), an extra in-suite bottle, one garment pressing, and one laundry bag per Journey. The 90-day window is the one that matters, since Marble & Co. Grill fills early on popular sailings. Watch the Deluxe Penthouse: its 463 to 657 sq ft range is wide enough that on Explora I and II the low end is barely above a Premier. Ask for the exact sq ft before you commit.

> **Value pick:** Premier Penthouse on a 7-night Journey. The entrance hall gives it genuine suite feel, and the step up from Ocean Terrace is often within reach. **Oversold:** the Grand Penthouse with Whirlpool exists only on Explora V and VI (December 2027 and August 2028). If it's quoted for an I or II voyage, the search is wrong.

Tier 3: Ocean Residences (the serious-stay tier)

SUB-CATEGORY	SQ FT	POSITION	STANDOUT FEATURE
Cove Residence	see range below	varies	Walk-in wardrobe, workstation, Calacatta marble bath
Cove Residence with Whirlpool	721–861 sq ft	prime positions	Outdoor whirlpool, Molteni&C furniture
Retreat Residence	829–872 sq ft	forward-most	Views over the bow
Serenity Residence	1,216–1,356 sq ft	aft	Wraparound terrace, private whirlpool
Cocoon Residence	1,604 sq ft	aft	Vast terrace; largest non-Owner option

This is the biggest service jump on the ship, not just square footage. You gain a dedicated Residence Host, priority embarkation, Dom Perignon on arrival, unlimited laundry, an in-suite full bar, two included spa treatments, and ground transfers both ways within 50 miles. Those transfers remove the one friction point that makes embarkation feel like a regular cruise. The Cove Residence with Whirlpool (721–861 sq ft) is the entry here, and on a 7-night Journey it's where the Aman comparison starts to hold up.

> **Value pick:** Cove Residence with Whirlpool on Explora I or II. The Calacatta marble and Molteni&C details show by day two.

Tier 4: Owner's Residence

VARIANT	SQ FT	SHIPS	KEY FEATURE
Owner's Residence	3,014 sq ft	Explora I, II, V, VI	Full-beam aft, multiple indoor/outdoor spaces
Owner's Residence by Patricia Urquiola	3,014 sq ft	Explora III, IV	New design interpretation

One per ship, 3,014 sq ft, spanning the full width of the stern. Dedicated Residence Manager, a private driver ashore once per Journey where available, up to four ground transfers, and a 180-day dining reservation window. The Patricia Urquiola interpretation on III and IV is architecturally distinct from the I and II version. If this tier fits your budget, inquire with real dates: availability is finite and I'll tell you honestly what's left.

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What's Included and What Costs Extra

INCLUDED	EXTRA
Dining at 8 of 9 restaurants	Anthology (Italian tasting menu)
In-Suite Dining, any hour	The Chef's Table (Explora III/IV)
Unlimited fine wines, champagne, premium spirits, beer, coffee	The Chef's Kitchen (III/IV)
In-suite welcome champagne	Rare wine at The Cellar (III/IV)
In-suite bottle of wine + bottle of spirit	Shore excursions
High-speed Wi-Fi, ship-wide	Spa treatments beyond the thermal area
Onboard gratuities	Air
Spa thermal area	Ground transfers (Ocean Suites/Penthouses)
Group wellness and fitness	
Port shuttles to city center where required	

Penthouse adds: a third in-suite bottle, one pressing, one laundry bag, and the 90-day dining window. **Ocean Residences add:** priority embarkation, Dom Perignon, a Residence Host, in-suite full bar, unlimited laundry, transfers both ways within 50 miles, two spa treatments, and an enhanced in-suite dining menu. **Owner's Residence adds:** a Residence Manager, a private driver once per Journey, and up to four transfers.

How it compares. Regent Seven Seas includes shore excursions and round-trip air in most fares; Explora does not. That's the single biggest structural difference. On itinerary-heavy sailings, budget roughly $150–$350 per person per port day for excursions and $800–$2,000 or more per person for air. On what's in the room, Explora is competitive; on total trip cost, Regent's bundle can come out ahead. Silversea includes butler service at most tiers, matched by Explora's Residence Host at Tier 3, though you pay more to reach it. Seabourn is comparable on food and alcohol; Explora edges it on square footage.

05

The Ship That's Right for You

Explora I (2023). 461 suites, 197 journeys listed. The original. The Hosts know the product and three years of new-brand kinks are worked out. Pick it for a sailing in the next 6 to 12 months and

the most options. Know going in: no Chef's Table, Cellar, or Chopard boutique. Those are III and IV.

Explora II (2024). Structurally identical to I, 192 journeys, with a stronger Adriatic and Greek Islands schedule. The Venice-to-Athens itineraries run on II in 2026. Pick it for the same proven product on a slightly newer ship. You aren't getting upgraded amenities over I.

Explora III (first voyage August 2026). 463 suites, 7 restaurants, LNG-powered. Adds The Chef's Table, The Cellar wine bar, The Chef's Kitchen, Shore Club on 11, Wine Curator access at Residence tier, and the Patricia Urquiola Owner's Residence. Pick it for the newest ship and the most complete dining program. Know going in: first voyages carry the usual new-ship risk, so waiting until early 2027 is reasonable if you want polished and proven.

Explora IV, V, VI. Not sailing yet (April 2027, December 2027, August 2028). V and VI introduce the Grand Penthouse with Whirlpool. Unless you're planning 12 or more months ahead, they don't belong in a current conversation.

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The Journey I'd Book First for a Hotel Loyalist

JOURNEY: A Journey Through Seaside Legends and Living History ID: EP20261029FSAPIR · SHIP: Explora II · NIGHTS: 10 DATES: October 29–November 9, 2026 ROUTE: Fusina (Venice) to Piraeus (Athens) PORTS: Venice, Zadar, Dubrovnik, Corfu, Volos, Thessaloniki, Mykonos, Milos, Nafplio, Athens STARTING PRICE: from $7,140 double (current fare, Ocean Terrace Suite)

Ten nights is long enough to settle into the ship and short enough that first-timers don't get antsy. Late October means the Greek islands are clear of August crowds, temperatures in the low-to-mid 70s, and Mykonos is the town and the water rather than a wall of day-trippers. The routing is a hotel loyalist's itinerary: Fusina puts you near historic Venice without the ferry complexity, Dubrovnik and Corfu's Venetian old town (a UNESCO site most travelers don't know) are walkable in a morning, and Nafplio is an hour from Mycenae and 45 minutes from Epidaurus. Athens on arrival gives you the Acropolis before flying home. Two sea days are where the ship earns its keep: a 420 sq ft terrace in the Aegean while Marble & Co. delivers lunch.

Suite for this Journey: Ocean Grand Terrace as an entry point, or step to Premier Penthouse if the budget allows. For a 10-night stay the entrance hall and indoor lounge matter, and in late October the spread is often under $2,000 total for two.

Before you book: reserve Anthology early if you want the tasting menu, it fills on popular sailings. Skip the industrial port of Volos and go to Meteora, the cliff monasteries about 90 minutes inland. For Mykonos, go ashore early, since afternoon ferry traffic slows the tender back.

Any onboard credit applicable to your booking comes from current Explora promotions and any Fora group allocation that applies.

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Where Explora Is Genuinely Weaker

This is the page most advisors won't write. I'm writing it because if you're surprised by these gaps after I send you, you'll blame me.

1. Evening entertainment is thin. Lounge music and occasional guest performers, no production shows. The design intent is that dinner is the evening event: Marble & Co. with the right table runs two hours or more. Right for many hotel travelers, thin by 10pm for others.

2. Shore excursions are not included or distinguished. Regent bundles them; Explora doesn't, and its tours are standard operator-arranged, not the private-guide-and-driver model. Book independently where you know the place. Otherwise budget $150–$350 per person per port day.

3. The dining reservation system has friction. Six of nine venues are free and excellent, but Marble & Co. and Sakura fill on popular sailings. Your window opens at 75 days (Ocean Suite), 90 (Penthouse), 120 (Residence), and 180 (Owner's). Set a reminder or take the worse times. It's a real reason to step up.

4. Embarkation is not seamless at lower tiers. At Ocean Suite and Penthouse you arrange your own arrival. It's efficient, but a line, not white-glove. Residences add a private seating area and priority luggage. One of the stronger arguments for at least Penthouse tier.

5. The fleet is new. Explora I (2023) and II (2024) have the kinks worked out; III launches in summer 2026. Three years in, some voyages are exceptional and some are merely very good. Silversea, Regent, and Seabourn have 30-year track records. If predictability matters more than novelty, that's real.

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What to Do Next

Explora's 2026 and 2027 booking window is open, and pricing shifts as availability tightens at Penthouse and Residence tiers on 7 to 12 night peak-season Mediterranean sailings. Booking through me costs the same as booking direct.

1. Send me your dates and rough suite tier. If you don't know the tier, tell me your typical hotel room (Four Seasons Deluxe? Park Suite? Villa?) and I'll translate it to an Explora range.
2. We do a 30-minute Pre-flight call. I'll have live USD pricing in your inbox before it, so we're not guessing.
3. After the call, if there's a Journey worth booking, I send a full comparison across tier, ship, and dates, with honest notes on which I'd pick.

Send your dates and where you're flying from to **justin@feldstein.travel** and I'll have pricing in your inbox within 24 hours.

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